

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHAMDNU
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 5212

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION UNITY AND THE GUJARAT ELECTIONS

REF: NEW DELHI 5002

SUMMARY: MORARJI DESAI'S FAST AND THE IMPENDING GUJARAT ELECTIONS HAVE PROVIDED IMPETUS TO THE SIX-MONTH-OLD TREND TOWARDS UNITY BY THE CONGRESS OPPOSITION. ON APRIL 14 A J.P. NARAYAN-SPONSORED MEETING IN DELHI SET IN MOTION A JOINT CONGRESS-O, JANA SANGH, SOCIALIST PARTY, BHARTIYA LOK DAL (BLD) ATTEMPT TO INSTITUTIONALIZE A NEW "FEDERAL" PARTY THAT WILL SEEK TO PRESENT CONGRESS WITH A UNITED FRONT AT THE POLLS, AND IN LEGISLATURES AT THE CENTER AND IN THE STATES. THE CHECKERED POST-INDEPENDENCE HISTORY OF OPPOSITION ATTEMPTS TO UNITE THEIR FORCES DOES NOT ENCOURAGE OPTIMISM ABOUT THE PRESENT EFFORT. THE DEGREE OF SUCCESS THE NEW COALITION ENJOYS IN POOLING ITS RESOURCES IN GUJARAT WILL BE A CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN DETERMINING THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION. IT MAY ALSO BE A GOOD INDICATOR OF THE SIZE OF THE THREAT CONGRESS WILL HAVE TO FACE AT THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS IN INDIA. END SUMMARY.

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1. SINCE MORARJI DESAI TERMINATED HIS FAST ON APRIL 13, OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS HAVE ACCELERATED THEIR EFFORTS TO TDS UNITY IN ANTICIPATION OF THE GUJARAT STATE ELECTIONS, NOW LESS THAN TWO MONTHS AWAY. J.P. NARAYAN HAS BEEN LEADING THE WAY. ON APRIL 14 HE CALLED TOGETHER HIS NATIONAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE (NEW DELHI 15938, 27 NOV 1974) TO SET IN MOTION THE FORMATION OF A "FEDERAL" PARTY TO INCLUDE THE CONGRESS-O, JANA SANGH, BHARTIYA LIK DAL (BLD), AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY. THE PARTICIPANTS REPORTEDLY AGREED THAT, WHILE EACH PARTY WOULD RETAIN ITS INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY, THE NEW UMBRELLA PARTY WILL PRESENT CONGRESS WITH A UNITED FRONT IN PARLIAMENT AND IN STATE LEGISLATURES-COMplete WITH A COMMON LEGISLATIVE LEADER AND POLICY PROGRAM. (SEE VAJPAYEE-TOMSEN, JAN. 15, 1975 MEMCON FOR FULLER DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW PARTY'S ROLE AS ENVISIONED BY THE JANA SANGH). A CONGRESS-O LEADER IN LUCKNOW TOLD THE PRESS APRIL 14 THAT MORARJI DESAI WILL LEAD THE NEW NATIONAL PARTY, WHICH WILL BE CALLED THE ALL-INDIA JANA (PEOPLES') CONGRESS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, CONGRESS-O, JANA SANGH AND SOCIALIST PARTY LEADERS HAVE AGREED TO JOIN THE NEW PARTY. BLD LEADER CHARAN SINGH HAS POSTPONED A COMMITMENT PENDING A MEETING OF HIS PARTY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. BLD POLITICIANS TELL US PRIVATELY THE BLD WILL JOIN AS WELL.

2. MORARJI DESAI'S FAST AND THE IMPENDING GUJARAT ELECTIONS HAVE CLEARLY CONTRIBUTED TO THIS RENEWED EFFORT TO INSTITUTIONALIZE A NATIONAL ALTERNATIVE TO CONGRESS AT THE POLLS. IN THE SHORT RUN, THE FIRST TEST OF THE COALITION'S STAYING POWER WILL COME WHEN OPPOSITION POLITICIANS IN GUJARAT SIT DOWN TO AGREE ON COMMON CANDIDATES. IF THIS HURDLE IS SUCCESSFULLY CLEARED, THE NEXT WILL BE THEIR ABILITY TO COOPERATE TOGETHER AFTER THE ELECTION. THE CHECKERED POST-INDEPENDENCE HISTORY OF OPPOSITION ATTEMPTS TO UNITE THEIR FORCES IN GUJARAT AND AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL DOES NOT ENCOURAGE OPTIMISM ABOUT THE PRESENT EFFORT.

3. GUJARAT, HOWEVER, DOES OFFER SEVERAL ADVANTAGES TO THE OPPOSITION AND J.P. AS A PRELIMINARY TESTING GROUND. THE EARLY 1974 UPHEAVALS SERVED TO DISCREDIT THE CONGRESS-R AND EXACERBATE ALREADY STRONG INTERNAL PERSONALITY AND IDEOLOGICAL SPLITS. THE GUJARAT CONGRESS- PARTY HAS YET TO RECOGNIZE A COMMON LEADER. LITERACY AND URBANIZATION RATES IN THE STATE ARE AMONG THE HIGHEST IN INDIA. IT WAS A SECTION OF GUJARAT'S URBAN, GENERALLY NON-CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTISAN ELITE (E.G., INTELLECTUALS, JOURNALISTS, COLLEGE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS) THAT HOUNDED THE CONGRESS-R ESTABLISHMENT OUT OF OFFICE LAST YEAR. IF THE ADVENT OF NEW ELECTIONS AND J.P. NARAYAN REACTIVATE THIS FORCE, IT COULD PLAY A SIGNIFICANT, IF AT THE MOMENT TOTALLY UNPREDICTABLE, ROLE IN ENCOURAGING OPPOSITION UNITY AGAINST CONGRESS-R, AND IN THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF.

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4. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE DIVISIVENESS THAT CHARACTERIZES THE CONGRESS OPPOSITION IN MOST OF INDIA IS JUST AS PREVALENT AMONG GUJARAT'S MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTIES: CONGRESS-O (THE LARGEST); THE REGIONAL KISAN MAZDOOR LOK PAKSHA (KMLP); AND THE JANA SANGH. NARAYAN HAS INSISTED THAT THE NON-CPI PARTIES ALLIED WITH HIS MOVEMENT NOT ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH THE LEADER OF THE IMPORTANT, RURAL-BASED KMLP, EX-CONGRESS CHIEF MINISTER CHIMANBHAI PATEL. PATEL'S ALLEGED CORRUPTION MADE HIM ONE OF THE MAIN TARGETS OF THE 1974 UPRISING. GUJARAT CONGRESS-O LEADERS DEPEND HEAVILY ON UNTOUCHABLE, TRIBAL AND MUSLIM VOTERS AND ARE THUS DISINCLINED TO COOPERATE WITH THE HINDU, URBAN-BASED JANA SANGH. INTERNECINE DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE NAV NIRMAN SIMITI, THE YOUTH ORGANIZATION THAT SPEARHEADED THE 1974 GUJARAT UPRISING AGAINST THE CONGRESS MINISTRY, HAS SPLIT IT INTO AT LEAST THREE FACTIONS.

5. MOST IMPORTANT IS A BASIC DIFFERENCE WITHIN CONGRESS-O ABOUT POLL STRATEGY. MORARJI DESAI IS PRESENTLY FIGHTING AN UPHILL BATTLE TO CONVINCE HIS MOST INFLUENTIAL COLLEAGUE, EX-GUJARAT CHIEF MINISTER HITENDRA DESAI, TO BRING CONGRESS-O INTO AN ANTI-CONGRESS-R ELECTORAL ALLIANCE. (HITENDRA DESAI HEADED A CONGRESS GUJARAT MINISTRY FROM 1965 UNTIL THE 1969 CONGRESS SPLIT. HE
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THAN LED A CONGRESS-O MINISTRY THAT HELD TOGETHER UNTIL JUST AFTER THE FEB. 1971 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, WHICH PRODUCED A VERITABLE EXODUS OF DEFECTORS FROM HIS PARTY TO CONGRESS-R. HE NEXT PIECED TOGETHER A CONGRESS-O-JAN SANGH-SWATANTRA COALITION MINISTRY THAT QUICKLY COLLAPSED). OVER THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS, HITENDRA DESAI HAS BEEN ARGUING STRONGLY FOR A CONGRESS-O "GO IT ALONE" STRATEGY WITH THE PROBABLE LONGER TERM OBJECTIVE OF PERSONALLY HEADING A CONGRESS-O-CONGRESS R MINISTRY AFTER THE ELECTION. OUR CONTACTS INFORM THAT HE IS NOW SEARCHING FOR A JUSTIFIABLE ISSUE, SUCH AS PATEL'S PARTICIPATION IN THE OPPOSITION FRONT, TO AVOID THE DAMAGING CRITICISM SUCH AS MOVE WOULD RAISE. THIS IN TURN HAS PUT CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE ON PATEL TO STEP DOWN TEMPORARILY IN ORDER TO ENCOURAGE AS MUCH UNITY AS POSSIBLE. IF HE DOES, PROSPECTS FOR AN EFFECTIVE UNITED FRONT AGAINST CONGRESS WILL MARKEDLY IMPROVE.

6. THE UPCOMING WEEKS SHOULD THEREFORE SEE CONSIDERABLE MOVEMENT WITHIN BOTH THE CONGRESS AND THE OPPOSITION CAMPS TO CREATE AND TO MAINTAIN A UNIFIED FRONT FOR THE ELECTIONS. THE DEGREE OF SUCCESS THE NEW COALITION OF OPPOSITION PARTIES ENJOYS IN GUJARAT WILL BE A CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN DETERMINING THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION THERE. IT WILL ALSO BE A GOOD INDICATOR OF THE THREAT CONGRESS WILL HAVE TO FACE AT THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS, WHICH MUST TAKE PLACE BEFORE FEBRUARY 1970.

7. THIS CABLE CONTAINS DETAILED AND PERCEPTIVE ANALYSES ON THE GUJARAT SITUATION PREPARED BY CONGEN BOMBAY.
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